

# THE ART OF THE KITCHEN

In the Ojai Valley, contemporary design embraces a timeless panorama

BY LISA SNIDER  
PHOTOS BY GASZTON GAL

**I**T'S THE END OF THE WORKDAY and architect Jeffrey Weinstein is enjoying a glass of wine with his wife, Wendy Wilson, in the kitchen he designed for her. "It's the first single-family home I've ever designed," says Jeffrey, who works mostly on commercial projects and green retrofits. "I always built for other people."

The 2,500-square-foot three-bedroom contemporary ranch home was several years in the making—a labor of love that started with a weekend visit to Ojai in 1996. They knew right away it's where they wanted to be. "[Ojai] has a natural attractiveness. It's very calming," says Wendy, a personal chef and a contract coordinator for a restaurant franchise business. She says that living in Santa Monica gave them "less and less time for enjoying life," so in 1998 she and Jeffrey bought the one-acre property, which at the time had an older three-bedroom home.

Over the years, they leased out the property while Jeffrey worked on design ideas, biding their time until they could afford to make the big leap from city life. "We were patient," says Jeffrey, who was eager to see their sons, now 11 and 12, raised in a small town.

**RIGHT:** Wendy Wilson pauses during breakfast prep to enjoy a recently completed mural by local artist Ruben Franco.





**TOP, FROM LEFT:** A Dutch door leads from kitchen to patio, and a German-engineered spice rack melds form and function. Morning light fills the space as the family – Joshua, Elijah, Wendy, Jeffrey, and their dog, Moka – shares breakfast.

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** A massive steel exhaust flue is the kitchen's centerpiece. Jeffrey designed the room for his wife, a personal chef who conducts cooking classes.

Realizing it was going to be more affordable to build a house from the ground up than to remodel the aging 1955 home, they offered to sell the house for just one dollar—land not included. The only other catch was that it needed to be hauled away in time for construction to begin.

“I called every church, every nonprofit, every organization I could think of ... I couldn't give it away,” says Jeffrey, shaking his head. Ultimately, they had no choice but to demolish it so building could begin.

Construction was completed in 2008, and in 2010 the family moved from their 1,500-square-foot condo in Santa Monica into their new Ojai home. The exterior features a pitched metal roof, redwood siding, and a wrap-around deck off the back with an outdoor stone fireplace. Inside there are two more fireplaces, one in the living room and one in the master bedroom, Brazilian cherry floors in the family room, and large windows at every turn to bring in natural light. The living room has 20-foot-high ceilings featuring Douglas fir and slate blue porcelain tile floors that look just like stone. The tile floors continue into the kitchen,

the home's focal point.

Jeffrey designed the exhibition-style kitchen for Wendy, a classically trained personal chef. She now has the ability to conduct cooking classes in a space that allows her to prepare meals while facing an audience.

The six-burner cook top is centered on a large, curved island with a blue-speckled Silestone countertop that seats four. Equipped with custom-made cherry cabinetry, a German-engineered built-in spice rack, and built-in Thermador and KitchenAid stainless steel appliances, the kitchen's most impressive design feature is the 10-foot-high stainless steel exhaust flue and hood. “I had to persuade the builder that it could be done,” says Jeffrey, pointing up to the top of the hood. “The only downside is you have to get up there and clean it.”

One final artistic touch was recently added to the recessed, curved upper wall of the kitchen where a colorful seven-by-12-foot mural was installed. The couple commissioned local artist Ruben Franco to create a scene that would depict one of Ojai's best-known crops. “I definitely wanted to have orange trees,” says Wendy of the

They offered to sell the house for just one dollar. “I called every church, every nonprofit, every organization I could think of ... I couldn't give it away.”





**ABOVE:** Utilizing a range of materials, the house, completed in 2008, is contemporary inside and out. A brick entryway blends with wood shingles, a stone base, and a metal roof.

**LEFT:** The family room features Brazilian cherry flooring and a sliding, wall-hung barn-yard style door.



mural, which is reminiscent of the vintage orange crate label art of the early twentieth century.

In addition to hosting cooking classes, Wendy bakes the challah bread for the local Jewish temple. Jeffrey has even been known to dabble in the kitchen on occasion, making French toast from her bread. And though Wendy's favorite culinary creations tend toward Thai, Korean, Indian, and other ethnic cuisines, Jeffrey's favorite is classic American home cooking at its best: "Key lime pie!" he says with a smile. ▣

The Weinstein-Wilson home will be featured as part of the annual **Holiday Home Look In tour**, put on by the Ojai Festival Women's Committee to raise funds for the Ojai Music Festival. The 2011 event takes place on November 19 and 20. Details online at [ojaifestival.org](http://ojaifestival.org).

**Architect/Kitchen Designer:** Jeffrey Weinstein, AIA, [jeffweinsteinaia.com](http://jeffweinsteinaia.com)

**Ojai mural:** Ruben Franco, [rubenfrancoart.com](http://rubenfrancoart.com)

**Amusing Cuisine cooking classes:** Wendy Wilson, [amusingcuisine.com](http://amusingcuisine.com)